



## MEMORANDUM

Date: October 1, 2015  
To: Board of Park Commissioners  
From: Susan Golub, Manager, Policy and Performance Unit  
Subject: Community Center Strategic Plan

### **Requested Board Action**

This briefing will describe progress to date in the development of the Community Center Strategic Plan since the previous staff briefing in July. No action from the Board is requested.

### **Project Background**

Seattle Parks and Recreation operates 26 community centers with a total budget of \$12.9 million. The overarching goals for community centers, as established in the Parks Legacy Plan (the 2014 strategic plan for Seattle Parks and Recreation) are:

- Ensure community centers are the focal points in our neighborhoods and serve as places where people can connect, foster relationships, build community, enhance their health and well-being by offering programs, activities, and events to Seattle's changing population.
- Ensure community centers are physically and emotionally safe and welcoming places for individual enrichment and community growth.

The Community Center Strategic Plan will include objectives and action items to accomplish these two broad goals. Further, the Plan will outline how community centers align with citywide initiatives regarding youth development, safety, neighborhood vitality, health, and education. Community centers should be the hub for a range of services that address critical needs aligned with the Community Center goals; Plan recommendations will chart a course to ensure this happens.

Racial and social equity underpin community center operations: centers are the equalizers in our City, giving *all* people a place to play, learn, connect, engage in healthy activities, meet and celebrate with their neighbors. Barriers to centers providing equitable access and opportunities will be addressed in the Strategic Plan, with strategies to overcome those barriers.

The original Park District proposal submitted to the City Council included \$2.6 million to increase community center operational capacity by adding staff to sufficiently cover existing hours *and* increase public hours. During the City Council's review of the Park District, the Council transferred half of the \$2.6 million proposed for community center operations to the community center

rehabilitation and development initiative, with the stipulation that if Parks prepared a community center strategic plan, the Council would consider moving the funds back to center operations. The \$1.3 million that was retained in the center operations initiative was used to provide the necessary staff for current operating hours; no additional hours were added.

While the impetus to produce the Community Center Strategic Plan came from the Council's stipulation on the operations funding, the Plan is as an opportunity to frame a long-term vision and policy direction for operating a vibrant, neighborhood-connected community center system.

### **Public Involvement Process**

Capturing public input on the Community Center Strategic Plan has come through a variety of avenues:

- 1) mini summit community meeting,
- 2) teen focus group,
- 3) outreach survey,
- 4) the Superintendent's listening tour, and
- 5) staff group analysis for the Racial Equity Toolkit.

A summary of the input from the public process is included as Attachment A to this briefing paper. The public process will continue after release of the draft plan in the first quarter of 2016.

### **Issues: Plan Development**

In addition to public input, the Community Center Strategic Plan is being informed by the following:

1. Recreation Demand Study: Parks and Recreation is conducting a Demand Study that looks at seven areas of recreation: community centers, athletic fields, environmental learning, senior programs, programs for people with disabilities, teens and off-leash areas. The demand study consultant, Tom Beckwith, is projecting demand using diary studies and aligning the diary data with Seattle's current population and a 20-year projection. In addition, our outreach surveys are underway.

The Demand Study will provide the data to assess equity in the distribution of services and the demographic data for understanding our communities, so that we can better connect centers with their neighborhoods. The Strategic Plan will address whether our programs align with the demographics of the community and what and where are the service gaps.

2. Expert Consultant/Survey of Current Practices: Ken Ballard, a nationally-renowned consultant in the parks and recreation field, conducted a survey of current practices in eight comparable cities, interviewed stakeholders and is providing on-going support to Parks and Recreation staff preparing the Community Center Strategic Plan. The findings from current practices survey will be evaluated in the context of Seattle's unique demographics and the locational and structural context of the existing 26 centers.
3. Facility Improvements: The Community Center Strategic Plan will evaluate facility improvements in order to guide spending of the Park District's Community Center Rehabilitation and Development initiative (\$3 million to \$4.3 million, depending on how much of the original

operations funding is returned). Eight centers are undergoing architectural and engineering assessments to inform Plan recommendations:

- Green Lake
- Hiawatha
- Jefferson
- Loyal Heights
- Magnolia
- Queen Anne
- South Park
- Lake City

These centers were selected because they did not receive any capital funding in the past three Parks and Recreation levies: the 1999 Community Center Levy, the 2000 Pro Parks Levy and the 2008 Parks and Green Spaces Levy. Lake City is the subject of a 2015 City Council Statement of Legislative Intent calling for Parks and Recreation to evaluate the costs of redeveloping or replacing the current Lake City facility, a small City building operated by a partner, the North Seattle Chamber of Commerce.

#### **Schedule**

The draft Plan will be released in the first quarter of 2016, with public and City Council review to follow.

#### **Additional Information**

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<http://www.seattle.gov/parks/projects/ccstrategicplan/>

## Attachment A: Summary of Community Center Strategic Public Involvement

1. **Mini Summit:** Held on Saturday, June 20th at the Seattle Center, the mini summit brought together people from throughout the City to voice their thoughts on centers. About 60 people attended, with a very diverse representation resulting from outreach to ethnic community organizations. Here are the questions and a summary of the responses.
  - **In a big picture sense, what makes you want to use or visit community centers?**  
People like to use community centers because they provide a range of activities and programming, and provide a space to meet and gather with neighbors and community.
  - **What programs, services, activities and/or events are most important to you, and why?**  
Participants discussed a wide range of programs, services, activities and events that were important to them. Those most frequently mentioned included: programs for teens/youth (physical activities, tutoring opportunities and a safe place to gather informally); fitness programs for all ages; and special events (family, seasonal, culturally specific).
  - **Are there barriers that keep you from using or visiting community centers? If so, what are they?**  
A number of barriers to community center use were mentioned repeatedly across the groups, including:
    - insufficient hours of operation
    - language (unable to obtain information on what's provided)
    - cost (too high for individual and group/room rental use)
    - poor customer service/unwelcoming staff
    - safety
  - **Without considering specific community centers, does it make sense for some community centers to be open more hours than others? Why or why not?**  
Most, if not all, participants agreed that all community centers needed additional operating hours. Most participants felt that hours of operation for individual community centers should be decided based on the needs of that community and the programs it provides, even if that means some centers are open more hours than others.
  - **If programs and services could be enhanced through partnerships with other for profit or non-profit organizations, what types, if any, are appropriate?**  
Participants supported partnerships with community-based organizations that are welcoming to all users. There was little to no support for partnerships with for-profit organizations and businesses.
  - **What improvements to programs, services and activities would you like to see? If you could pick one thing to improve what would it be?**

Participants suggested a wide range of improvements. Some of the more frequently mentioned were: employ/train a more diverse, welcoming and culturally competent staff; implement longer operating hours; provide more translated information on programs/services; and, pursue partnerships with community-based organizations.

**2. Teen Focus Group:** Held on July 16 at the Langston Hughes Art Institute, the Teen Focus Group brought over 100 teens together to talk about their interests/needs regarding community centers. Here is a summary of the teen responses to questions similar to those asked at the mini summit:

- **Important programs, services, activities and events**

Participants mentioned a wide range of programs, services, activities and events that were important to them. Those most frequently mentioned were:

- Sports and other physically active programs
- Educational programs (tutoring for young children, SAT/ACT prep, life skills and career development)
- Community building events (barbeques, movie nights, family activities)
- Late night options for teens

- **Barriers to community center use**

Those most frequently mentioned barriers were:

- Lack of transportation options (no transit, no one to drive)
- Cost of transportation (School District has cut back on distribution of ORCA cards to students, and ORCA cards that are distributed are not valid in the summer)
- Areas around some community centers are not safe
- Not enough activities that are interesting for teens
- Community center hours are limited

- **Community center hours**

Most, if not all, participants agreed that all community centers need additional operating hours. Some participants said that all community centers should be open the same number of hours. Others said hours should depend on neighboring community needs. A number of teens mentioned that community centers hours should complement school hours and schedules (programs before and after school, late night and increased hours over school vacations).

- **Community center partnerships**

The teenagers at this meeting had many ideas for how partnerships might improve community center operations. The most frequently suggested partnerships were with:

- Sports related organizations to provide funding, sports equipment, discounted sporting event tickets and improved sports programming.
- Technology based organizations/companies (e.g., Microsoft, Google) to provide funding, equipment and instructional assistance.

- Environmental education groups
- Food banks
- Physical and mental health organizations

At least one group said that it was important to make sure partnerships do not raise community center user costs.

○ **Community center improvements**

The most frequently mentioned improvement was the need for food assistance programs during the school year and the summer. Another commonly suggested improvement was more activities/programs for teens (after school and during summer). One group specifically identified funding for Teen Life Centers as their number one priority. Other improvements discussed were tutoring programs, safety measures, more staff and more operating hours.

3. **Survey:** The community center survey was open for input for approximately 3 months; we received about 900 responses, including versions translated into Spanish and Chinese. The data is being collated, and the responses will inform Plan recommendations. In addition, Parks and Recreation issued a general survey covering a wide range of recreational programs, including community centers. These responses will be combined with the community center specific survey.
4. **Superintendent's Listening Tour:** Parks and Recreation Superintendent Jesús Aguirre is hosting a series of community meetings throughout the summer and fall to share his vision for the future of the department and to learn more about the unique needs of each of the city's diverse neighborhoods. Staff are documenting comments, many of which are about community centers.
5. **Staff Group Analysis for the Racial Equity Toolkit:** The City's Racial Equity Toolkit is an evaluation tool for ensuring new programs, projects and policies consider impacts/outcomes with an equity lens. A group of center staff met twice to analyze our current community center program through an equity lens, discussing what changes would improve equity. Review of the draft plan via the Racial Equity Toolkit will occur later in the process.